DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 572 UD 027 710

AUTHOR Hirsch, Judi
TITLE Assessing the Potential of Underachieving College Students: Feuerstein's Learning Potential Assessment Device.
PUB DATE Oct 89
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Montclair State College Institute for Critical Thinking Conference (Upper Montclair, NJ, October 19-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Cognitive Ability; *Cognitive Measurement; College Students; *Disadvantaged Youth; Educational Change; Higher Education; Learning Problems; *Minority Groups; *Underachievement
IDENTIFIERS *Feuerstein (Reuven); *Learning Potential Assessment Device

ABSTRACT

Schools must change, if more working class and minority children are to succeed in college. Reuven Feuerstein (1979, 1980) was given the task of assessing youth who arrived in Israel after World War II. Many scored so poorly on intelligence tests that they were thought to require custodial care. Feuerstein developed a method of mediated assessment, the Learning Potential Assessment Device, which enabled him to assess the current cognitive functioning of an individual and to prescribe a plan for remediation. His method is here illustrated in a contemporary case study. A 16-year-old Mexican American student who was well behaved and in good health derived no benefit from his classes. He was found to be fluent in Spanish but illiterate in both Spanish and English. Five instruments were used in his assessment; here, only the use of the Complex Figure Drawing is described. Results and recommendations follow, showing how the mediator was able to assess his level of functioning. U.S. schools must, in Feuerstein's words, "shift from static measures of ability, which encourage giving up on some children, to dynamic assessment, which points the way to sharpening...children's mental skills." A reference list of 11 items is included. (DM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Montclair State College Institute for Critical Thinking Conference

October 19-21, 1989

Critical Thinking: Focus on Social and Cultural Inquiry

(Critical Thinking and Psychology)

Assessing the Potential of Underachieving College Students:

Feuerstein's Learning Potential Assessment Device

by Dr. Judi Hirsch

California State University, Hayward

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED325572

Answers are largely based upon who is asking the questions, their purpose, and the context in which they are asked. When we look at the context of our social and cultural inquiry, we should note who we are, to whom we are speaking, and what we are speaking about. We should note the current composition of our student body and faculty, and we should note which groups in our society are underrepresented.

What accounts for the low enrollment of working class people and people of color at institutions of higher learning? How can we transform what Freire (1970) calls this "culture of silence"?

One of our roles as "critical thinkers" is to ask questions. For instance, we might want to think about why each of us is here. Did we come to share? to learn? to find others who share our vision? What is our vision? How have our different backgrounds affected us as learners? as teachers? What struggles were involved along the way?

As we look around and notice who is here, and who is <u>not</u> here, and as we focus on social and cultural inquiry, it is incumbent upon us to ask why there are so few people of color or of the working class included in this discourse on class and ethnicity.

If we are committed to an honest critique, we must make an effort to include members of all economic classes and cultural groups. As representatives of the group currently in power, we <u>must</u> do the work of broadening the discourse at the level of inquiry. We can decide to become responsible for everything we care about. If we want to change society, we must change the schools. We must decide to work for educational change.

FL 017 710

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Judi Hirsch

Oakland Unified Sch Dist

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

As educators, we must constantly be working against isolation and building alliances. The main function of a leader is to assist others to empower themselves to become leaders, and we are in a unique position to do this.

Motivation is one of the biggest factors affecting student performance, which is, in turn, highly correlated with teacher expectation.

What can we expect? As the philosopher Martin Buber said, it is the duty of each teacher to see students as they can be, not as they are at the moment.

As with the women's movement, the support of our male allies made it easier for us; the civil rights movement included many whites as allies who believed that democracy meant that all of the people have the right to vote.

If we really believe that all the people have the right to learn, if it is unacceptable that there are more black men in prison than in college (Cockburn, 1989), we can lead the struggle in the schools against racism and classism.

We may need to take some risks; we might even upset some people, but we need to challenge the passivity of learners and teachers. We need to surround ourselves with others who share our vision.

We must watch our words and our assumptions. We can either accept responsibility for repeated failure, or continue to blame the victim--the students, their parents, their class, their ethnic group.

Of course, we may not want to risk the chance that increased competition may cause some of us to lose our jobs. If the pie stays the same size, sharing it with more gives each a smaller piece. We also need to be aware that those who are not sharing the pie at all might be resentful. But if we maintain our insular lives, what is done to our psyches when we must consciously and continuously ignore large masses of people as we go about our increasingly more insular lives? Furthermore, the existence of a permanent underclass will ultimately erode the foundations of our democratic society.

As Ron Edmonds, (cited by Clayton, 1989), one of the founders of the Effective Schools movement said:

> We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need, in order to do this. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't [done so] so far.

What we need is a pedagogy of liberation (Freire, 1985). This requires a political decision. Once we decide, we need to commit ourselves fully to supporting people along the way. This is imperative if they are not to succumb to the internalized oppression of racism and classism.

The reason many people don't learn is because of internal and external oppression (Jackins, 1983). We can help them to overcome both. We can help people see themselves as they really are: fully intelligent and capable of learning.

We also need to share what we've done to make the schools a force for liberation (Hirsch, 1987). We need to share successes as well as failures. We need to learn from each other. I would like to share some of what I have learned from Reuven Feuerstein.

Feuerstein is interested in learning potential. Those of us who use his Learning Potential Assessment Device (LPAD) ask the learner to risk success. We set up the assessment situation so that it will reveal to both of us--the learner and the examiner--the most accurate picture of the student's potential for learning. At this point in time, the LPAD seems to be one of the most hopeful tools we have for broadening the discourse by bringing more people of color and working class people into institutions of higher education.

According to Feuerstein, people learn in two ways: they learn by being taught, and they learn from contact with the world around them. For education to be meaningful, certain factors must be present. The teacher, or mediator, must make the interaction important; the mediator must be interested in transcending the moment, so that the learner will be able to act appropriately and independently the next time a similar situation is encountered. For this reason, a mediated learning experience (MLE) must involve the learner in the learning process. The need for the requisite behavior must be explained, as well as its connection to the future.

"Please take out the vegetables and wash them," prepares someone to make a salad at some future date. "Please let me know how many eggs are left" leads to counting and then deciding whether or not to purchase more. These are empowering activities. Asking someone to "Sit down and eat," or "Answer the questions on page 115," doesn't prepare the recipient for independence.

The more MLE a person has had, the more one can benefit from encounters with the world. People who have experienced less mediation are less able to benefit from contact with the world around them. Part of this world includes school.

There are reasons why certain groups of people may experience less mediation than others. Much of this was discovered by Feuerstein when he was chief psychologist for Youth Aliyah, the agency responsible for finding placement for the adolescents who came to Israel when that country was first founded in the late 1940's. Part of his responsibility was assessment. As it turned out, many, many of the youth who were arriving from North Africa and war-torn Europe scored so poorly on standardized intelligence tests that they were thought to require custodial care (Feuerstein, 1979).

Feuerstein is quoted as saying that, "after losing 6,000,000 people in the war I couldn't bear to lose any more" (Cordes, 1984). He began to look for deficits in the test rather than in the children. This led him to focus on the process of learning rather than on its product. He surmised that those who were deprived of MLE would do much better if the assessment included some mediation. His theory proved correct.

Children from war-torn environments, like children raised in extreme poverty, are not living in situations which are predictable or stable enough to allow for planning and organization on the part of their parents. Often, as a result, these children are being deprived of their culture. We also see the lack of mediation among groups whose children are deliberately culturally deprived. This happens when people decide not to pass down their history, traditions, and customs to the younger generation, often out of a desire and hope for better treatment from the dominant culture.

Unfortunately, this decision usually backfires. Children who grow up bereft of their past are unable to plan for the future. They find it hard to be tolerant or appreciative of themselves--or others--because they lack an understanding of who they are. They are deficient in the very cognitive skills which would enable them to learn from the world around them which they wish to become a part of. Finally, being deprived of their own culture does not automatically make them part of or acceptable to the dominant group. Thus, they are left in a state of cognitive undress.

Fortunately, people can always benefit from re-mediation, and that is what Feuerstein decided to focus on. His LPAD is a means by which to assess the current cognitive functioning of an individual, note how much mediation is necessary for intellectual growth, and then recommend a plan for remediation. It's that simple.

Perhaps a case study would be most helpful at this point (Hirsch, 1984). S. was brought to my attention by his parents when he was sixteen years old and in the ninth grade. They were concerned because he did not seem to be making any progress in school. His teachers all said that, while not a behavior problem, S. was not benefitting from his classes.

S. had spent most of his life in Mexico, and had not attended much school. He spent two years at our junior high, was in one bilingual class--math--and had two ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. Although fluent in Spanish, he was illiterate in both Spanish and English. A recent physical examination revealed that he was in excellent physical condition.

The school psychologist attempted to assess S.'s intellectual functioning using standardized tests, but was unable to do so; S did not appear to know enough for there to be any meaning attached to his score. As the Resource Specialist, I was also involved in the assessment. I asked S. to draw a person, and was given this (Figure 1):

It appeared like the drawing of a six year old. Then I tried to see if S. knew his colors--a task usually asked of children in the primary grades. The following chart (Figure 2) indicates the order in which S. named the colors; the letters refer to his language of response, English or Spanish.

FIG. 1

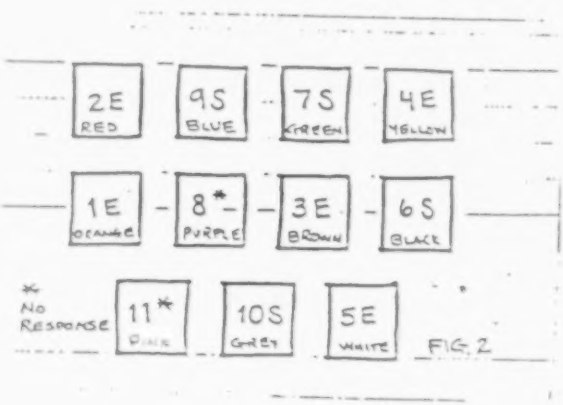

FIG. 2

Certain behaviors were noted: S seemed to name the colors in random order; his choice seemed rather arbitrary. At this point I suggested using the LPAD, since he appeared to be lacking in the rudimentary skills associated with schooling, such as proceeding from left to right and top to bottom on a page. He was assessed in Spanish over a two-week period, with the following results.

It should be noted that during a dynamic assessment, the examiner is constantly making tentative hypotheses about the learner's cognitive functioning which might account for his current behavior. These hypotheses are confirmed only when the same patterns are repeated across different modalities and on various tasks.

Part of the investigation of the learner's thinking skills involves an attempt to locate his strengths and weaknesses in a particular phase of the mental act: input (information gathering), elaboration (using available data and cues), and output (communication of insights, answers, and solutions). Additionally, the examiner notes how much investment of effort and time is required for the subject to make use of the assistance offered. This information will be very important in determining how accessible this person is to efforts at re-mediation.

Although five different instruments were used in this assessment, I will only discuss one: the Complex Figure Drawing. I usually begin with this particular item for several reasons: it doesn't require much time; the results are usually quite powerful both for the learner and any observers who might be present; it is the most empowering of all the sub-tests, since it requires more action on the part of the student than any other; it is easily understood by observers.

As with all of the instruments, the pattern is the same. A baseline is established showing current cognitive functioning. Then the examiner intervenes and mediates. The amount of mediation needed to move the student forward is noted, as is the time required for this effort. Another sample of behavior is taken, which will hopefully show the benefits of intervention. We can then extrapolate and see how responsive this person would be to re-mediation.

Figure 3 shows the Complex Figure Drawing. The student is asked to reproduce this while the examiner is noting the way in which this is accomplished. Figure 4 is S.'s Copy I. After a few moments, he is asked to draw the figure from memory. The results are shown in Figure 5.

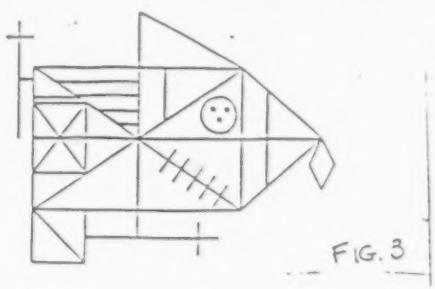

FIG. 3

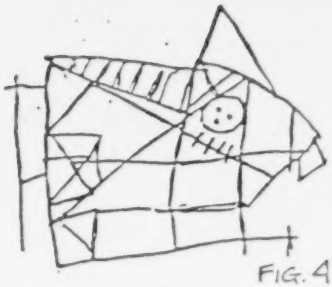

FIG. 4

FIG. 5

Aside from noticing the 90° rotation, which indicates problems with spatial orientation, people unfamiliar with the purposes of the LPAD might erroneously conclude that the reason for S.'s lack of progress in school was attributable to his very poor "short term memory".

The importance of the difference between the LPAD and standardized, psychometric measures is very clear. We are not interested in what S. can do without intervention, so rather than use this as an example of what S. can do, we use it as a baseline, and see how much better he can do with help.

The next step is for the examiner to try to help the student improve upon his copy and memory drawings by discussing those deficient cognitive functions noted while he was working without mediation. In Copy I the examiner noted that S. began the drawing at the left, with the "antenna" and just proceeded along until the drawing was completed. The "gestalt" was ignored. It was surmised that this approach accounted for the results seen in Memory I.

After much discussion about what was the most important part of the CFD, the analogy of building a house seemed to be the most helpful. S. understood that one can't put on the windows until there's a foundation and frame, and so, in this learning phase (Figure 6), he saw the necessity of drawing the large rectangle first, then the two diagonals, etc., and finally, the less important parts, such as the "antennas". He began to see the need to organize his thinking before beginning to draw. The next two steps are a repetition of the first two: Copy II and Memory II (Figures 7 and 8).

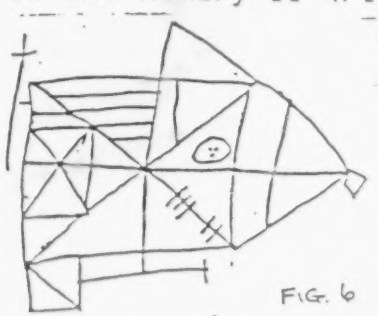

FIG. 6

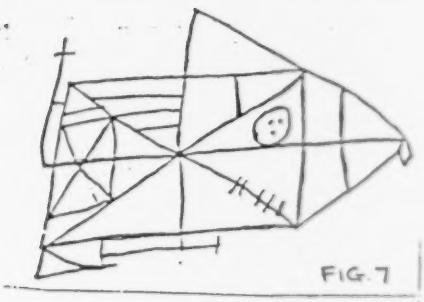

FIG. 7

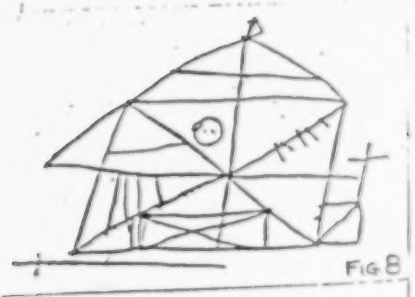

FIG 8

While it is true that his second memory shows a rotation, it is not only far superior to his first memory, but is also much better than his first copy! Note: more time could have been spent on mediating all of the "errors" so that these last two drawings would have been even better, but that is not the point of the assessment. We are interested in noticing how much time and effort is required to move this student forward, and how much he can be moved. It is rather obvious that this student is very capable of learning.

Four other assessment tools were used in order to obtain a clear picture of S.'s cognitive functioning. The results showed the following deficient cognitive functions:

<u>At the input phase</u>:
blurred and sweeping perception
unplanned, unsystematic exploratory behavior
impaired verbal tools
impaired spatial orientation
impaired need for precision and accuracy in gathering data
difficulty in considering two or more sources of information at once

<u>At the elaboration phase</u>:
impaired planning behavior
episodic grasp of reality
narrowness of mental field
impaired need for pursuing logical evidence
lack of strategies for hypothesis testing

<u>At the output level</u>:
deficiencies in visual transport
egocentric communication modalities
impaired verbal tools
impaired need for precision and accuracy in communicating responses
impulsive and unplanned behavior

The result of this assessment indicate that S. is very capable of learning. He is also highly motivated and very interested in what he was doing. He was able to tolerate a lot of frustration when involved in a mediated learning experience. This strong desire to learn, coupled with parental concern and support, lead to a very optimistic prognosis.

Recommendations for intervention included remediating the following deficient cognitive functions:

blurred and sweeping perception
precision and accuracy in data gathering
using all sources of information
improved spatial orientation
planning behavior
improving verbal tools
improvement of visual transport
precise and accurate communication
pursuing logical evidence and hypothesis testing
contradicting an episodic grasp of reality

This case study points out Feuerstein's concerns about American schools. He says they "must shift from static measures of ability, which encourage giving up on some children, to dynamic assessment, which point the way to sharpening...children's mental skills" (Cordes, ibid).

His goal is to help children increase their ability to benefit from encounters with all kinds of stimuli and experiences. "Schools must...create an atmosphere conducive to change" (Cordes, ibid). Teachers must change their beliefs about children.

We must ask ourselves: are we part of the problem or part of the solution? What is your next step in making educational change?

I would like to hear from you. Please contact me at 114 Echo Avenue, Oakland, CA 94611, (415) 653-0776.

The author would like to thank her colleague, Susan Schacher, a teacher of Adult Basic Education at Laney Community College, for her thoughtful comments on the draft version of this paper.

References

Clayton, C. (1989, July). We can educate all our children. The Nation, 249(4), 132-135.

Cockburn, A. (1989, July). Beat the devil: All in the family. The Nation, 249(4), 113-114.

Cordes, C. (1984, May). Reuven Feuerstein makes every child count. APA Monitor, 15(5), 18-19.

Feuerstein, R., Rand, Y., & Hoffman, M. (1979). The dynamic assessment of the retarded performer: The learning potential assessment device, theory, instruments and technique. Out of print. (Available from D. L. Markus, 708-432-5660).

Feuerstein, R., Rand, Y., Hoffman, M., & Miller, R. (1980). Instrumental enrichment: An intervention program for cognitive modifiability. Out of print. (Available from D. L. Markus, 708-432-5660).

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Seabury.

Freire, P. (1985). The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Hirsch, J. (1984). Learning potentail assesssment device report. Confidential psychoeducational evaluation.

Hirsch, J. (1987). A study of a program based on Feuerstein's theories intended to teach high-level cognitive skills to African-American and Mexican-American junior-high-school students identified as learning disabled. Unpublished dissertation. (Available from UMI, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106).

Jackins, H. (1983). The reclaiming of power. Seattle: Rational Island Publishers.

Scapegoating the Black Family: Black Women Speak; Myths, Realities, A Program for Action. Special issue of The Nation, July 24, 1989, 249(4), 110-151.